

Aston, PA— With hospitals around the nation facing a significant shortage of nurses, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) brought together local members of the profession to consult about ways to deal with troubling trends. (A list of attendees is provided below.) The total number of nurses in America is expected to fall 36 percent by the year 2020 as the lack of young people choosing the career has caused the average age of Registered Nurses (RNs) to rise to 47. During the roundtable at Neumann College, the group concentrated on attracting more students to the field and providing them the best possible education. — “Having lived with my wife and daughter in a pediatric oncology ward, I understand the significance of quality nurses to our health care system,” said Congressman Sestak. “It is a crisis when the American Hospital Association releases finding from a survey of about 5,000 community hospitals, as it did last year, stating that hospitals need 116,000 Registered Nurses to fill immediate vacancies. In part through meetings like this, I hope to work as a partner with the nursing community to improve nursing education, retention, recruitment and practices.”

Registered Nurses from area health care providers, including Mercy Fitzgerald and Crozer, attended the discussion along with the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals, and leaders of nursing programs at Neumann College and the Delaware County Technical School. All of the parties involved referenced the lack of quality nursing education, with part of the solution being to ensure additional funding for faculty. An American Association of Colleges of Nursing showed that nursing colleges and universities were forced to deny admission to 42,866 qualified applicants because they did not have enough instructors for the 2006-2007 school year.

As a member of the House Nursing Caucus, the Congressman has supported legislation to increase funding for nursing education and provide nurses with deserved benefits. He helped pass the Fiscal Year 2008 Labor Health and Human Services Appropriations Bill that provided millions of dollars in increases for nursing workforce development programs, focusing on training, retention and workforce diversity. In addition, the Congressman cosponsored the Nurse Staffing Standards for Patient Safety and Quality Care Act, requiring hospitals to implement staffing plans that meet specified ratios for nurse-to-patient staffing levels, and the Safe Nursing and Patient Care Act, prohibiting health care facilities that receive Medicare funding from mandating that nurses work beyond their predetermined shift. In no instance would a nurse need to work more than 12 hours in a 24-hour period or for more than 80 hours in a two-week period.

“If we do not act quickly to address our shortage of nurses, there is no question that patient care will suffer,” said Congressman Sestak. “The journal Health Affairs showed in a 2006 study that an increase in nurse staffing can prevent thousands of patient deaths and reduce the number of

days that patients must stay in the hospital by millions. I am glad that we have started to consider these factors in Congress, but much more has to be done and hearing from the experts as I have done today is a necessary part of the process.”

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.*